

Gulf of Mexico Red Snapper

Proposed Interim Measures

Frequently Asked Questions

March 2007



Why did NOAA Fisheries Service propose interim measures for Gulf of Mexico red snapper?

- A recent red snapper stock assessment indicates continued overfishing is compromising the objectives of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper rebuilding plan.
- The red snapper rebuilding plan was approved by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) in 2004, and is designed to phase out overfishing of red snapper by 2009 and rebuild the red snapper population (stock) to sustainable levels by 2032.
- The Gulf Council postponed discussion of needed regulatory action until January 2007, which effectively prevented NOAA Fisheries Service from implementing any permanent regulations proposed by the Council in time to address overfishing during 2007.
- If overfishing continues in 2007, then substantially more severe harvest reductions will be required in 2008 to end overfishing by 2009.
- Consequently, NOAA Fisheries Service determined interim measures are needed to address overfishing of red snapper during the 2007 fishing year.

What interim measures were proposed?

- In summary, the proposed interim measures would:
 - Reduce the commercial red snapper minimum size limit from 15 inches to 13 inches total length;
 - Establish a goal to reduce red snapper bycatch mortality in the shrimp fishery to 50 percent of the bycatch mortality that occurred during 2001-2003;
 - Reduce the total allowable catch quota of red snapper from 9.12 million pounds (mp) to 6.5 mp, resulting in a commercial red snapper quota of 3.315 mp and a recreational red snapper quota of 3.185 mp;
 - Reduce the recreational red snapper bag limit from four fish to two fish per person per day; and
 - Prohibit the captain and crew of for-hire vessels from retaining the recreational bag limit.
- The full text of the proposed rule to implement interim measures is accessible online at: <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/ProposedTempRule07.htm>

How were the interim measures developed?

- NOAA Fisheries Service considered the effectiveness and impacts of a range of interim measures in a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), which was made available to the public on October 13, 2006.
- The DEIS compared the pros and cons of each management alternative.
- The agency accepted public comments on the DEIS through November 27, 2006.
- The DEIS may be obtained online at:
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sf/RedSnapper/ProposedTempRule07.htm>

How did the proposed interim measures differ from the preferred alternatives in the DEIS?

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| • DEIS | • Proposed interim measures |
| – 33% reduction in total allowable catch quota | – 29% reduction in total allowable catch quota |
| – Reduced recreational fishing season | – No change to recreational fishing season |
| – Reduced recreational minimum size limit | – No change to recreational minimum size limit |
| – Gear restrictions | – No gear restrictions |
| – Procedural (“framework”) mechanism Gulf Council can use to quickly manage shrimp effort | – No framework procedure |

Why did the proposed interim measures differ from the preferred alternatives in the DEIS?

- The DEIS evaluated alternatives to reduce catch and bycatch rates of red snapper on both a temporary and long-term basis, whereas the proposed interim measures addressed overfishing only during 2007.
- The proposed interim measures were slightly less restrictive than those proposed in the DEIS because NOAA Fisheries Service assumed fishing effort will be slightly below average during 2007 because of the adverse effects of the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons. This temporary reduction in fishing effort is not expected to continue beyond the year 2007.
- NOAA Fisheries Service determined it is not appropriate to implement on an interim basis, measures that would require fishermen to invest in new gear or equipment, such as circle hooks and de-hooking devices.
- Additionally, while NOAA Fisheries Service supports the preferred alternative in the DEIS that would modify the Gulf Council’s shrimp framework procedure, the agency believes it is more appropriately implemented as a long-term rather than interim measure given the temporary nature of interim measures.

Was there an opportunity to comment on the proposed interim measures?

- The public comment period on the proposed interim measures extended through 5 pm, January 26, 2007, to encompass the last day of the January 2007 Gulf Council meeting.

- NOAA Fisheries Service considered all comments received on the proposed interim measures while developing the final interim measures.